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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted of 55 preschool children attending Title XX day care centers in Amarillo, Texas, to investigate the cognitive, language, fine motor, and socioemotional development of the children. Results indicated that the students were below the 50th percentile for their age group norms on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised, the Test of Early SocioEmotional Development, the Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration, and the Stanford Preschool Internal-External Scale (Form II). Children whose parents paid full day care costs scored higher in language ability than did students in protective care and students receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. All three groups of children were below age-level norms on visual-motor skills. The children perceived themselves as being externally controlled by others in their environment. Contrary to expectations, children who were under protective care of the state did not have lower self-ratings on socioemotional development. (JDD)

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LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS OF TITLE XX DAY CARE CHILDREN

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LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS OF TITLE XX DAY CARE CHILDREN

There is a great debate today regarding preschool children who are "at risk" for failure when they enter school. Early identificaiton of children with potential learning problems has received much attention from the education community (Berker, 1976; Lipson, 1981; and Pre-K Program for Four Year Olds). Emphasis on predicting learning problems prior to the time a child begins the formal learning process has raised many questions. Early identification of severely involved children has seldom created much problem, since these children usually exhibit behaviors easily detected by parents or pediatricians. However, the real problem has been the identification of children with mild problems who are not usually identified until they have failed in the primary grades. Title XX centers are likely to have a significant number of children in this category.

How many children are there presently enrolled in day care centers who may be "at risk" or have potential learning problems? Current estimates indicate approximately ten percent of the day care center population meet the "at risk" expectation. This percentage rate could be higher or lower depending upon the children receiving services in a typical day care center.

This article reports the findings of a recent study conducted in Title XX day care centers in Amarillo, Texas. The purpose of the study was to investigate the cognitive, language, fine-motor and socio-emotional development of children attending a publicly supported day care system. With such knowledge, day care providers may be able to provide better day care programs for these children.

The subjects for the study were fifty-five children attending three of the centers in Amarillo. The subjects were randomly selected by age classes

from these three centers. They were representative of children in all six of the centers.

Several different testing instruments were used to obtain a broader information base about these children. To test the cognitive and language areas, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test Revised (PPVT-R) was used. The PPVT-R measures a child's hearing vocabulary for Standard American English. In this sense, it is an achievement test, since it shows the extent of English vocabulary acquisition. It also provides a quick estimate of one major aspect of verbal ability for subjects who have grown up in a Standard-English speaking environment (p. 2).

The PPVT-R was standardized nationally on a selected sample of 5,028 persons: 4,200 children and adolescents, and 828 adults. It was published by American Guidance Services in 1981.

The Test of Early SocioEmotional Development (TOSED) was also administered. It is designed to be a total environmental measure of preschool children's socio-emotional development. It permits evaluation of children's behavior in multiple settings and by several individuals. The test (1) helps identify children who may have behavioral/emotional/learning disabilities, (2) documents the degree of deviance from normal by observers or by the children themselves, and (3) may be used to identify areas for intervention.

This study involved two of the TOSED scales: one administered to the children and the other to the teachers. The Student rating scale contains thirty items to which students respond with a simple "yes" or "no" answer. An example student question is, "Do you like to play with other children?" The examiner reads each item to the student and then records the student's response. The purpose of these items is to ascertian student's perceptions

of their own personal behavior, their behavior as it relates to authority figures, and their behavior in interpersonal relationships with other children.

The Teacher Rating Scale contains thirty-six descriptive phrases such as, "The student is lazy, bullies other children, does not separate easily from parents..." These are evaluations made by teachers who see the students in an educational setting. The items relate to the students' personal behavior, their behavior with authority figures at school, and their interpersonal relationships with classmates.

The TOSED was standardized on a sample of 1,773 subjects aged 3 - 0 to 7 - 11 years. It was published by PRO-ED in 1984.

The third test administered was the Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (VMI). It is designed to serve as a screening instrument to identify difficulties in learning. It is based on theories to support the belief that intelligence and achievement have a sensorimotor basis in development. These theories propose there is a significant relationship between sensory experiences and motor capabilities.

The VMI is a sequence of twenty-four geometric forms to be copied with pencil on paper. The forms are arranged in order from simple to complex. The VMI was revised in 1982 on a sample of 3,090 children. It is published by Modern Curriculum Press.

The final test administered was the Stanford Preschool Internal-External Scale (Form II). It is designed to measure children's expectations about whether events occur as a consequence of their own action (internal control) or as a consequence of external forces (external control). The forced choice format elicits expectancies about locus of control separately from positive and negative events. The SPIE was standardized on a sample of

422 preschool children.

Each child in the study was tested by one of four trained examiners during the fall of 1987. Test results for all subjects were then subjected to computer analysis.

The means and standard deviations for scaled scores were classified as high, medium, and low for each variable (PPVT-R, TOSED - teacher rating, TOSED - student self-rating, VMI, and SPIES). The classifications are presented in Table I. Children were grouped according to three variables: (1) protective care AFDC, (2) food stamps and income eligible, and (3) full pay.

[Insert Table I about here]

As may be seen in Table I, group 1 (protective Care-AFDC) scored highest in the TOSED student self-rating and lowest on the remaining four variables. Group 2 (food stamps and income eligible) were rated highest by the teachers on the TOSED and ranked in the middle on the remaining four variables measured. Group 3 (full pay) scored highest on the three variables measured by the PPVT-R, VMI, and SPIES, ranked in the middle on teacher ratings (TOSED-teacher rating) and lowest on the TOSED-student rating. All test results were below the 50th percentile when compared to the standardized norms presented in the test manuals.

Examination of information presented in Table I for the five variables indicates that this representative sample of students attending Title XX day care centers were below the 50th percentile for their age group norms as presented in the test manuals. Therefore, it is concluded that all children in these categories are "at risk" as defined by authorities in child development.

Day care teachers rate the students lower in their socio-emotional development than do the children. This could suggest that day care teachers perceive the behavior of these students lower than is expected for their age group and in need of behavior change. On the other hand, the students perceive their behavior as normal, based on their own expectations. One should expect children who are under protective care of the state to have lower self-ratings as confirmed by the teachers' expectations, but this was not observed. Could such children have learned outward survival skills that allow the student to perceive their behavior as that of other children? This unexpected finding needs to be investigated with larger numbers of children to determine if this finding remains.

Day care children's performance on the expressive language art is below age norms. The high rankings of children whose parents pay full day care costs should be expected based on life experiences of these children. The low ratings for protective-care and AFDC children should raise concern. These children have low receptive language skills. Receptive language is necessary for success in school and social situations where students must listen for directions. Thus language development programs must be identified and stressed in day care educational programs.

This sample of children were "at risk" or below expectations in the development of visual-motor skills. This finding suggests that children attend Title XX day care centers have not had adequate opportunity or exposure to tasks that require the fine motor skills of tracing, drawing or scribbling. Day care center curriculum needs to allow these children more opportunity to use crayons, paper, chalk, or Montesorri tracing insets for pre-writing activities.

The children in this study rate themselves as not being able to control

events in their environment. They tend to perceive themselves as being externally controlled by others in their environment. This finding implies that these children need to be provided the opportunity to make selections for themselves and given options form which to choose rather than being totally controlled by teacher, parents or guardians in their environment.

The results of this initial investigation suggest that students attending Title XX day care centers are "at risk". The ranking of the five variables suggest students who are classified as protective care and AFDC have less developed cognitive skills than other children in public day care centers. Administrators, center directors, and center teachers will be required to work cooperatively to develop language, motor, and socio-emotional skills for these children. Further study and development of specific programs for both children and teachers in Title XX centers is greatly needed.

Table I

High, Middle and Low Scores for the Variables PPVT, TOSED-T, TOSED-S, VMI and SPIES

	Variables				
Groups	TOSED Teacher rating	TOSED Student rating	PPVT	VMI	SPIES
1	Low	High	Low	Low	Low
2	High	Middle	Middle	Middle	Middle
3	Middle	Low	High	High	High

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